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CORN

By RUTH LECHLITNER

Here at our side
Corn flows, row upon row
Beneath the white light of the moon.
Ribbons of supple silver and green shadow
Ripple with soft, warm rhythm
Under a wind
Flesh-sweet with summer.

Between wide fields
Lie the great dusky trees,
Their purple boughs
Heavy with night silence,
And the pale sky like water shines beyond them.

There is a place of quiet in the curve
Of sleeping hills:
In the cool dark,
In the dim scent of clover,
Are broken stones
Marking forgotten graves.
Old willows make a ghostly mist above them,
And over the grass
Spread shadows like great wings.

Forgotten death . . . so near,
Near this straight, strong magnificence
Of growing corn:
Out of old graves the hidden sweet of bread,
Out of old dreams the nourishment to hunger,
Out of hushed life the old, inaudible rhythm —
Corn for brown hands,
Corn for ruddy hearts,
Corn for new love. . . .

Dear one, we walk tonight
Hand in warm hand,
Over the miracle of yielding earth.
The invisible pulse of music is about us,
The cool white moon lays loveliness upon us,
There is the whisper of young heart to heart —
(Spare now no tears for death — that is forgotten . . .)
Here is new life,— the lush, great growth of it:
Gold reaching to the stars.

While dreams seal our lips,
The corn leaves sing
A poem of prairie nights:
And they who sleep in the quiet of the hills,
In the cool dark, may listen too . . .
And know.

Let us walk softly . . . softly.

THE PICNIC

By TUPPER GREENWALD

The bus—Pop didn't like the name, but the girls and particularly their boy friends used no other — the bus was parked in the sun outside the house on Elm Street, a miracle of gloss from the washing Pop had given it early that morning. Pop had belabored it with a pungent yellow polish upwards of an hour — worked like a horse. He had found it scabby with mud, for the girls had been out in it the night before — God knows where. And with their boy friends, of course. Mom had appeared on the back porch, a can of that scouring powder she used in her hand. But Pop had waved her back into the kitchen.

"Nope. Clean it m'own way. You fix up them san'wiches."

Mom hadn't argued, even though she swore by that scouring powder.

"They up?"

"I'll take a look," Mom had replied.

"Well — better not. They didn't get in till three. It's only nine now. Us'llly take ten hours Sundays, don't they? You better fix them san'wiches. What time their boy friends coming?"

"One — start out ha' past."

"Well, then let's us don't waste time talking. Fix them san'wiches — an' lay out my mohair — " Then he amended, "My summer suit," for the girls had with sly imperiousness referred to it as the mohair.

The girl's boy friends came early. At twelve-thirty they were in possession of the parlor. The loud speaker was muttering a sermon. Their high-pitched, rather nasal voices reached the upstairs in jangling reverberations.

"Wake up! Your country needs yuh!" from Freddie, Maybelle's boy friend, muscular, tanned, and knickered.

"In one sec!" from Maybelle upstairs. "Don't want me down stark naked, do you?"

"Suits me," gurgled Alf, who was Gert's and rather fat but cute in a collegiate sort of way.

"Oh, Alf — yoo-hoo!" cried Gert. "Naughty-naughty!"

Pop heard. He was getting into his mohair — his summer suit.

"They're here," he murmured to himself — then in a barking tone to the girls in the adjoining room:

"Don't needa yell the house down!"

Pop's admonition was lost in the scampering *click-clack-click* of heels, the grunt and scrape of yanked dresser-drawers, the trilling voices of Maybelle and Gert, who always sang when they dressed.

Within earshot now were soft, sluggish footfalls like so many sighs mounting the kitchen stairs — obviously made by house slippers obviously Mom's. He heard her voice in the hall outside the girl's room.

"They're here," anxiously.

And he heard Gert's airy, genial fling:

"Don't we know it, old darling? Mom, the eats fixed?"

Old darling! Pop couldn't repress a snort. Mom was eternally kowtowing — no backbone in her whatsoever. It got his goat sometimes, not merely because kowtowing seemed to him silly, but because he himself was often guilty of it. It made him furious to see faults of his own in other people. It made him angry with himself, and therefore angrier with them. Doggone it, sometimes he thought Mom was deaf.

"The san'wiches 're done, all but the cutting," he heard her say. "How d'you want 'em?"

Gert grew matter-of-fact:

"Diagonal, Mom — club style, y'know. And you better

hurry up and get into your clothes. Wear that voile."

Hurry up! He wouldn't — he'd take his time. He hadn't suggested this picnic anyway. It was the girls. They had insisted that their boy friends were "just dying to meet the folks." A picnic together in Muller's Grove would be just too cute for anything. Besides, Mom, the old darling, hadn't been out — really out — in ever so long.

"Have you, Mom?"

"Well now —" Mom had said in the way she always did, in a such-things-aren't-for-me-you-just-run-along-and-have-a-good-time manner that invariably made him wince.

"Oh, be sociable for once, Pop, old thing," Maybelle had pouted.

Well, as usual the girls had had their way. But when you got right down to it, why had they wanted this picnic? Just to make dear old Mom and Pop happy in a get-together spirit? Humph! He had his suspicions, suspicions that had of late cropped up again and again like the pain in a sore thumb. Maybelle and Gert wanted marriage with their boy friends. Yessir! They wanted to get away. You couldn't get around that. They wanted to get away. Sure. They thought him an old stick-in-the-mud; and Mom — well, they were laughing up their sleeves at Mom constantly. They old-darlinged and old-thinged her all over the place. Not that they wanted to hurt the folks' feelings in the least, but all the same — Yep, the girls were going, sure as God made green apples. This picnic with the boy friends was the first step. They were giving notice. They wanted Mom and Pop, the old darlings, to get acquainted with Freddie and Alf; to show the old things how far matters had gone, and to grease the ways for further progress that must end in separation. He and Mom were being let down easy. He began to sense that in a thousand little things he and

Mom had been let down easy. Luckily Mom didn't understand or she'd have a fit.

Now he heard Maybelle and Gert flinging themselves down the hardwood steps leading to the reception hall, all ebullience and animal spirits, giggles and chirpings and wise cracks. "Now I'll tell one. . . . That's the boloney. . . . I'll slap you down! . . . Hot Sheba! . . . Hot dog! . . . Hot mamma! . . ."

A familiar scratching and croaking, a metallic *zing!* and the Victrola blared, then cackled and guffawed. The girls and their boy friends were dancing. He listened to the jerky, curvetting flow of the music — how it twisted and turned in subtle meanderings. It was deceptive, lacking in order and solidity. You couldn't put your finger on its meaning. When a smooth run of notes seemed bound for an expected fillip, there was an abrupt, mischievous reversal — like a thumbing of the nose. It gave you the laugh. It made you feel out of things, as might a crazily witty speech you couldn't follow. Pop picked up a washable tie, crisply white, and tied it into an infinitesimal knot. It hurt.

Mom drifted into the room. She began to divest herself of the gingham housedress, then doffed the boudoir cap. Her hair fell slowly in uneven tufts.

"The eats fixed?" Pop asked. He had a sense suddenly of having talked to her all that day of little save edibles; and he thought of many other days when the talk, if any, had centered upon the same subject.

"Everything's fixed. We better hurry up."

He stopped to adjust a shoelace. The effort cost him a sigh.

"I'm taking my time," he announced. "They're young enough to stand a little waiting, I guess. That's about all that living is — waiting." (Now what on earth was making him talk that way?)

"I guess so," said Mom. "I put in a piece of that

rhubarb pie you liked yesterday. It's at the bottom of the basket in a napkin."

"All right. Say, have those boys got jobs?"

"They both work. One of 'em makes thirty-five and the other one forty-two-fifty, the girls told me."

"When was this?"

"The other day."

"I see," said Pop. "Well, I'm going out in the back yard. When you're ready you c'n call me. Take your time."

The yard was a little lake of sun-swept concrete. The pine garage was painted yellow, with a roof of composition shingles whose crust glistened from a myriad particles. Perpendicularly overhead, the sunlight fell like a blow. Puffing, Pop circled the garage to a small expanse of weeds and unruly grass in the rear. He stood in the shade cast by the wall and looked up at the sky. It was a clean, piercing, virginal blue, almost white. Not a cloud, not a single sign of rain, Pop thought, not a single, solitary sign. It was June, all right, and the old world looked as fresh and clean as a baby. Pop sighed. Yep, that's the way the old world looked.

From the house dim cacklings reached him. *Hmm* — they were still at it. They never got tired, never, nev —

"Frank — "

That must be Mom's voice.

"Frank — "

Slowly Pop walked back. He found himself facing Mom, who stood on the narrow porch holding the picnic basket. He stopped and stared on the hot concrete. Mom's short figure was hung in lavender voile. Her straw hat, whereon lay three violets, was a trifle askew. Pop liked that hat; only a year ago it had seemed at the apex of style. He wiped his face with his handkerchief.

"Get in outa that sun," Mom said.

"It don't bother me."

"Maybelle just called they're ready."

"Why, they're still dancing, ain't they?" he said sharply.

"They quit ten minutes ago. They been waitin' in the machine."

"Oh — " with a little start.

Pop came in out of the sun.

In the bus Maybelle had cried, "I'll call Mother," and now, standing in the middle of the front walk, she beckoned to her parents.

"Mom!" she said impatiently, in a low voice. "Come on!" She ran up and in a still lower voice adjured Pop:

"Pop, *you* carry the basket."

Pop winced; his hands hung foolishly.

Mom said, "It's no trouble — me with my market baskets."

Maybelle, with a shrug, hop-skipped back into the bus beside Freddie.

"Mother, you get in here, next to Alf and me," cried Gert. "Mother, you've met Alf."

"Delighted," said Alf.

"Please to meetcha," said Mom.

"And this is Father, Alf."

"Well, well — how's everything?" said Alf.

"Howdy," said Pop.

"You know Freddie, Mother," said Maybelle from the driver's place. "He's been wanting to meet you for a long time."

"How-de-do — how are yuh?" said Freddie.

"And this is Freddie, Father," said Maybelle.

"Howdy," said Pop.

"And how're *you*?" said Freddie. "All set for the picnic, eh?"

"Yep, all set," said Pop.

The bus was like a chatterbox. It confused him.

"Well, well — " said Alf. "You better lemme have that basket, Mrs. Trimble."

Mom didn't hear, somehow. She merely stood, blinking.

"Mother, you sit next to Alf and me," Gert said. "Give me that basket."

Pop noticed that Gert was preparing to sit on Alf's lap.

"Unless Mother wants to sit on my lap," laughed Alf.

"Naughty-naughty!" laughed Gert. "Alf's trying to make you, Mother."

Everybody laughed.

Gert bounced into Alf's lap. Mom got in. Her hat brushed the top of the bus, almost fell off, but Gert caught it in time.

"Get in next Mother, Father," said Maybelle, pressing the starter.

Well, Pop thought, a moment later, here I am, riding with the girls and their boy friends. Air's pretty close here — not much breeze — and what a lot of talk flying back and forth between the two couples!

"Yep — yes — oh, yes," Pop kept repeating, no matter what was said.

He was pressed pretty tight against Mom's side. Mom's head was nodding again and again, her face a little pink. A flat smile lay on her mouth like a pasted thing. It hung loosely. Any moment it might be shaken off, Pop thought. He wondered if his face looked like that. He wondered if it wore that funny what's-it-all-about look. What in the world had been ailing Mom lately, anyway?

Pop breathed in perfume, the scent of the girls' hair. The boy friends reeked of shaving lotion and the hair stuff they used. Mom smelled of soap. In my day, Pop thought, men had curls, and they combed one big lock down and across their foreheads like John L. Sullivan between bouts. These kids' heads looked like beavers'.

"Forgot to empty the icepan," Mom whispered.

So that was what was worrying Mom. She was queer.

Pop saw that Gert's skirt had worked itself a trifle above the knees. The knees were pink. He saw one of Gert's hands in one of Alf's; and he couldn't help noticing how often she turned her face directly towards Alf's, bringing it so close that the two faces almost touched. In front Freddie was sitting right spang up against Maybelle, who, talking to beat the band, head thrown now towards Freddie, now towards the rear, drove, Pop thought, as if the bus were a thing you could give orders to, orders it just had to obey. Once she put her fingers on Freddie's hair and smoothed a piece of it a sudden breeze had lifted.

The bus was forced to halt at a railroad crossing while cars laden with coal rolled by. It made you hotter than ever, Pop thought, to look at all that coal. But then it made you think of winter. Winter was more comfortable than summer by a long sight. Funny — here it was June and fuel was being shipped. The world certainly moved fast. Time couldn't catch it napping, no-sir!

"Alf's father works on the railroad," Pop heard Gert say. "Don't he, Alf?"

"Yeh," said Alf.

"Is that so?" Pop heard himself say. He began to think of Alf's father helping the world keep ahead of time.

"Uh-huh," said Alf.

"He's an engineer," put in Gert.

"On the B & O," said Alf.

"On the B & O?" asked Pop.

"Yeh, on the B & O."

"That's a mighty fine road," said Pop.

"So he says," said Alf.

"Who — your father?"

"Uh-huh — he says it's a pretty good road. I don't know, I prefer the Pennsylvania myself."

"I never rode on it," said Pop.

"It's a great road," said Alf. "Didja ever take the extra-fare train to New — oh, that's right; you said you never been on the Pennsylvania."

"Nope, I never have."

He had never travelled much, come to think of it. A trip to Chicago, one to Cleveland, another to Cincinnati to attend a sand-gravel-and-crushed-stone convention. That had been about all. Alf's father must travel a good deal, he thought; but then when travelling was your work, you couldn't call it travelling, could you? That wasn't getting away from things, was it?

Pop suddenly heard Gert exclaim, "Oh, Alf, what was the name of that thing they played at Kelly's last night — you know — it went — uh, let me see — uh —"

Alf was thoughtful a moment. "Oh, you mean *Just Gimme Love, That's All*. Let's see — the chorus — uh —"

Pop listened. Alf sang.

*"You can take my Rolls — ta-da-ta-da-da-da!
It won't put me in the hole,
If you just gimme Love, that's all.
You can take my tux;
It cost me ninety bucks —
Just gimme Love, that's all.
You can take my flat
And you can take my hat;
Take the silk shirt
From off my back,
But just gimme Love, that's all.
Love, Love, Love-a-dee Love
Fits my heart like a motorman's glove!
Just gimme Love, that's all.
I said that's all!"*

"Hot cookies!" cried Freddie.

"That's a hot song," said Maybelle and began —

*"You can take my Rolls
It won't — it won't —"*

*"Put me in the hole,
If you just gimme Love, that's all!"*

prompted Alf, and then led the quartet in the singing.

Now and again Pop stole glances at Mom's face. Its expression was more bewildering than ever. The smile still lay on her mouth — very loosely, though. She wasn't going to cry, was she? He couldn't make her out.

The song subsided. There was a long silence during which only the whirring of the wheels sounded. Maybelle was stepping on it, all right.

"You like to dance at all?" asked Alf.

"Who — me?" said Pop.

"Yeh." Alf was nudged reprovingly by Gert.

Pop murmured, "Well — can't say I do."

Gert laughed.

"Father hasn't danced in years. But I bet in the old days —"

Maybelle opened the muffler — the bus had reached a straight white road — and cried solemnly, "If I couldn't dance, I just wouldn't want to live."

"Now I bet Mother —" Freddie began, but Maybelle hushed him with a swift glance.

"Oh, I guess dancing's all right," Pop said, looking straight ahead. "A lotta people go in for it. What the majority wants oughta go, I think."

"My father's dead against it," Alf said.

"Well, you know a engineer's gotta be steady."

Alf didn't seem to like that, nor did Gert.

"And even if a engineer did like dancing, look at his hours," Pop continued.

"Well, we'll be hitting Muller's Grove any minute now," Freddie cried.

Suddenly Gert pointed to a sign by the roadside.

"Wait a minute — what's that?"

"Paloma Beach!" exulted Maybelle, applying the brakes so abruptly that the bus skidded and groaned.

It made Pop a little dizzy. For a moment Mom, thrown forward, clutched his arm to steady herself. Pop gazed at the sign.

"Looks like a bathing beach," he said.

"Say, that's some great old place!" cried Alf.

"I'll say!" from Freddie.

"What say we stop off and go in, huh?" suggested Maybelle.

"Suits me," said Freddie, looking questioningly at Pop. "Oh, let's move on. Muller's Grove is —"

Maybelle said, "Oh, the folks won't mind, will you, Mother?"

Mom shook her head.

Gert said, "Why, Father, we can picnic right on the beach."

"Well, I ain't got a suit," Pop said.

All this was happening too suddenly to please him. Not that he wanted to stand in the way — he was as good a sport as the next fellow, but this certainly was — well, a little too sudden.

"We haven't got suits either," Gert was saying. "You rent 'em. Gosh, we can all cool off. It's so hot." Gert was beginning to pout.

"Well, go 'head — 'cept I don't feel much like bathing." And Pop tried to conceal his irritation with —
"Fact is, I took a bath last —"

"All out!" cried Maybelle.

"Mom and me'll just watch — that's all right."

"That's all right," said Mom.

"If you don't really mind, folks —" said Alf.

"Oh, that old Muller's Grove!" from Maybelle, who stood with Freddie outside the bus.

"Go right ahead," said Pop.

Alf and Gert clambered out.

"Last one down's a wet cigar!" Alf shouted.

The girls and their boy friends scampered down a short, grassy hill leading to the Paloma Beach locker-house.

"See you all in ten minutes!" cried Freddie over his shoulders.

A half hour later Mom and Pop were sitting on pebbly sand in the shade of a bush. The beach seemed a field of legs, white and twinkling in the sun. Maybelle and Freddie and Gert and Alf appeared in the distance.

"They look sweet from here — the girls — don't they?" said Mom.

"I didn't know they allowed one-piece suits."

They watched the girls and their boy friends wave, one after the other, then run lickety-split towards the water, the girls screeching — Pop could just about catch the sound — as the boys, hurtling and leaping, pulled them along. The brown water received them, brown spray flying.

After a moment Mom spoke:

"I e'n just about make out their heads. Right over there." She pointed.

"That ain't them. They're over by that big boat — the green one — where all those fellas and girls are."

"Oh, they're talking to 'em."

"Yep, I guess they must be friends." Hmm — that was funny, finding friends here just like that. Well, it probably would have happened at Muller's Grove, too.

"Now they're splashing water on each other."

"It's hot," Pop said, and removed his hat and coat.

"Oh, look! Maybelle's gonna dive."

"That ain't Maybelle."

"That's her hair."

"She's got her hair covered with a cap."

Mom hesitated— then: “I mean the way her neck —”
He was sure that Mom wasn’t seeing a thing. “Nope, that’s somebody elst.”

“Let’s get down closer where we c’n see better,” Mom suggested.

“There ain’t any shade.”

Mom grew tense. “That *is* Maybelle!”

“Oh *now* — now it is.”

They watched Maybelle do a dolphin.

“Wasn’t that pretty!” said Mom. “Just like a bird or something. I’d be scared to do that.”

“Well, when I was her age, that was nothing.”

“Oh, looka that! He’s trying to duck Gert!” Mom’s pale eyes flashed.

“You mean she’s ducking *him*. Darn if she didn’t.”

“Gertie’s a strong girl,” said Mom.

“Lookut him rub the water outa his eyes. Gosh, he’s a sap.”

“Oh, Alf just let ’er do that,” said Mom.

“Which makes him all the more of a sap,” said Pop decisively.

“I wonder if they’re hungry yet.”

Pop started. He had been wondering similarly. “If they were they wouldn’t be where they are.”

“Suppose I take ’em a little something.”

Pop stopped her with a glance. “You better stay here. You’ll get wet.”

“Don’t you want anything, Frank?”

“No — I ain’t hungry.” That was Mom’s way — yes-sir! She just would talk about food. She had talked about it for years. It had begun, it seemed, with the first cry of the babies at birth. Still, he shouldn’t be blaming Mom for her talk. He had countenanced it. In fact, one night long ago he had said, “Well, when a man gets married he has to sort of stop thinking of himself

and he has to begin thinking about his home." He had said that rather proudly then.

"That piece of rhubarb —"

"Nope. Later on. Whew! it's hot. This handkerchief is just about —"

Mom reached into the picnic basket and pulled out a napkin.

Pop passed the napkin over his brow, then folded it once and fanned himself with it.

"Like a little mineral water?" he asked.

"No, but maybe you better go over and get some. They'll want something to wash the san'wiches down with."

There it was again! It got his goat, somehow. Wasn't it sort of silly to be overlooking yourself all the time? "There's plenty time, I guess. It'll be warm by the time they come out."

An hour passed.

"It's three-thirty," said Pop, after consulting his watch.

"They oughta be hungry by now."

"Does it look like it?"

Mom half-rose and cried, "Oh, look! They're getting into that boat."

"That's a canoe." He didn't like canoes. Years ago he had gone paddling on this same river, and had got caught in the heaving wake of a coal-steamer. Only the most expert manoeuvring had saved him.

Mom looked worried. "It isn't safe. I wish they hadn't met those friends."

"It does look pretty dinky."

"Oh, Frank, don't you remember when you almost had that accident?"

"Oh, that wasn't anything," he reassured her.

"I'm going down and tell 'em not to."

Pop frowned. "Stay here!"

Mom rose. "It isn't safe!"

"Don't be a fool!" Pop cried sharply.

Mom sat down.

"They don't wanna see you," he murmured.

"What?"

He eyed her fixedly. "Honest, sometimes I think you're deaf or something, Mom."

They watched the canoe disappear in a close-packed swarm of others. Mom was craning her neck. "I've lost 'em," she said. "Can you see?"

Pop couldn't see them at all, but he said, "Yeh," expansively. "Yessir! Right over there—those boys know how to paddle, all right."

"Where at?"

"Right over — there!" She was making him lie and he didn't like it.

"I wish I had my glasses."

"Oh, they c'n swim," Pop said. "There's no danger. The water's low. They'll have to come in soon. It's gonna rain."

"Why, there ain't a cloud in the sky."

"How about that one?" Pop pointed.

"That's white."

"It'll turn black soon enough. You watch."

"It won't."

"It will."

"Well, if it does, they'll get caught in it right out in the river — right in the middle —"

Pop couldn't help scowling.

"Don't argue, will you!" he snapped.

At five o'clock Mom cried, "There they are! There they are!" She rose to her feet.

Pop had been lying on his back, the napkin spread over his face, feigning sleep. He sat up quickly, lifted himself to Mom's side. He gazed for a long moment. There they were, the craft drifting lazily.

"Yep," said Pop. "There they are right around that bend. I told you there was nothing to worry about. I guess they got hungry."

He wiped his face with the napkin, then added, blowing through his teeth, "Let's sit down — the way we were."

Mom continued to stand.

"Sit down," a little crossly. Mom did so, saying, "Now you get the mineral water while I lay out the san'wiches."

Pop walked off towards a confectionery stand nearby, one eye cocked for the girls and their boy friends.

Maybelle and Freddie, Gert and Alf came walking slowly up the sandy slope, arm in arm.

"Why, where's Father!" cried Maybelle.

"Gone over for some mineral water. Here's some san'wiches for you boys."

"Oh, isn't Father a dear!" cried Gert.

"I'll say!" cried Freddie.

"He's all right," from Alf.

"Oh, we had a darling time," cried Maybelle.

The boys selected sandwiches.

Between bites Freddie spoke. "You folks didn't mind us — uh — leaving you?"

"No," said Mom. "We had fun just watching. Pop was saying what fine paddlers you boys were."

"You're a real sport, Mrs. Trimble!" said Freddie.

"Here's some sweet pickles, boys."

"Oh, here comes Father!" Maybelle pointed.

"He's certainly a prince," said Alf.

"Here's something to wash those san'wiches down with," Pop said, advancing. Head lowered, he passed the bottles. "Here's some straws. I squashed 'em a little, but I guess they'll draw."

"Thanks, Mr. Trimble," Alf and Freddie said in unison, the latter adding, "Say, Mr. Trimble, the water was

just great. I wish you'd been with us. We didn't stay long, did we?"

"It's close to five bells." Then looking at his watch: "Five-fifteen."

"As late as all that!" Gert exclaimed. "Why, we were thinking of —"

Maybelle, with a glance at Gert, interrupted:

"The time just whizzed by. Try one of these pimentos, Freddie. And Father, why don't *you* eat?"

"Oh, I been munching off and on all afternoon."

"We ain't hungry," Mom said. "There's some cookies here for whoever wants 'em."

Covertly Mom laid the napkin-wrapped piece of rhubarb pie on Pop's lap. Pop put it back in the basket.

"Ain't hungry."

The journey back home was made in beginning dusk. In front Freddie held one frank arm about Maybelle's shoulders. Gert sat on Alf's lap and toyed with his hair.

"Well, folks," said Alf, "we're goin' out again sometime and we'll take in Muller's Grove."

"In a coupla weeks or so," Freddie agreed, "when I get back from the road. I travel for Brenner-Busch Gas Ranges."

Maybelle said, "Father, Freddie's got a real good job, haven't you?"

"Oh, it could be worse."

"That's mighty fine," Pop said.

"Yep, we're all goin' out again to Muller's Grove," Alf repeated.

Freddie said, "It wasn't exactly right for us to 'a' gone off and left you folks the way we did."

"Oh, that's all right," said Pop. He almost added, "We're used to it."

"We had a good time," Pop heard Mom murmur.

"We'll go out again soon," said Freddie.

"I'm afraid I'm gonna be pretty busy from now on," Pop said.

"Oh, not on Sundays, Father," cried Maybelle.

"Well — you can't tell."

"Well, well — here's old Elm Street again," said Alf.

Yep, here was the house, dim in the shadows. Pop could just catch a flicker in the windows from the street lamps. It was his house, entirely his — not a penny owing on it. The bus stopped.

"Father, we're going to sit out here a while yet," Maybelle said.

"All right."

Pop got out: Mom followed.

"Very glad to have see yuh, Mr. Trimble," said Alf.

Pop nodded.

"—And thanks for the eats and everything, Mrs. Trimble," Alf continued.

"Same here — good night, folks," said Freddie.

"Good night," said Mom.

Mom walked ahead of Pop, who carried the empty picnic basket — empty save for a debris of napkins and the piece of rhubarb pie. Pop thought he heard the sound of a kiss from the bus.

Mom disappeared into the house. Pop seated himself one one of the porch-chairs — stretched out his legs. Gosh, he was tired. The crease was gone out of his mohair — his summer suit. It was getting darker and darker — a little chilly, too. But he was imagining that. He removed his collar and the white washable tie. He felt his neck; there was a ridge where the tie had pinched. He could hear Mom pottering about inside, opening windows. Whew! he was dog-tired.

Suddenly he heard footsteps on the walk — Maybelle's. He could tell.

"Pop, I'm sorry we left you that way. The boys — Freddie's a little broken up —"

"Oh, don't be so foolish — that was all right."

"But Pop, you see, I wanted to tell you — Freddie, he proposed to me."

She sat down on the porch railing facing him.

"In the canoe?"

"Well, yes, but last week he did too. I like him loads and loads, Pop. He's got a real good job, and —"

Pop was surprised that he didn't feel a shock. But then again he wasn't surprised, no — sir! It merely went to show how when you prepared yourself for a thing it couldn't hurt you — much. Yep, that's what you had to do in life, — prepare yourself for things. He had begun to see that a short time ago. Now it was working out.

"Well, you're old enough to know your mind, I guess."

"And Freddie, he thinks just the world of you and Mom. Pop, I was just thinking — I'd hate to leave you—"

The old stunt — letting him down easy! But then, after all, when you get right down to it, what else could she say? She couldn't tell the real truth, could she? He couldn't stand hearing it anyway.

"Don't be foolish. Just don't tell Mom — just yet."

"Oh, Mom knows."

"You told 'er?"

"No, she asked — and I just had to tell her — last week."

"I see," said Pop.

"It's all right then, isn't it? I told Freddie 'yes'."

Pop unlaced a shoe that was hurting him — then —

"Sure — and about leavin' us — well, I left my home when the time came. Mom left hers. I guess it's about the most natural thing in the world. The world couldn't grow otherwise."

Maybelle kissed Pop right on the nose.

"We'll have Gert for a time, anyway, after you're gone, I guess."

"Pop, we're going out to Kelly's now — dance. They serve a nice chicken dinner if you wanna come along."

Nope, thanks, he wasn't going along. He had had enough doings for one day.

"Mom and me, we ain't your age — we're all fagged out. We can't go hopping around the way you can. Ain't hungry one bit."

She kissed him again and hop-skipped back into the bus. Pop watched her soft, lithe figure flutter in the darkness — saw it swallowed up by the bus.

Mom came out on the porch in her house dress. Pop wondered whether she had been listening from the inside of the reception hall.

She didn't speak.

In the street the bus began to roll back and forth, brakes squeaking, as Maybelle swung the wheel. Her face wore a film of light from the glow of the dashboard lamp. Pop watched it turn toward Freddie's. Freddie's face was beamingly proprietary. Gert and Alf were invisible. But he could hear their voices:

"You can take my tux;

It cost me ninety bucks. . . ."

"There they go," Mom said.

"Yep." Pop got up from his chair, adding, "Guess I'll get a little ice water."

Mom cried, "Mercy! I better empty that ice pan. It must be running over."

She beat Pop to the door. Pop put a hand on her shoulder, so lightly she hardly knew it was there.

"You sit. I'll tend to it," he said.

From the bus:

"Love, Love, Love-a-dee Love

Fits my heart like a motorman's glove. . . ."

"You wanna drink?" Pop asked, turning.

"Yeh," said Mom. "Thanks."

BRIEF REVIEWS

Transatlantic Stories. (Dial Press, \$2.50). It was a happy thought to bring out a volume of the tales which have lent distinction to the *Transatlantic Review* for the last few years. No student of the contemporary short story will care to miss this collection. The modern "expressionist" school is perhaps better represented than other genres of today's fiction. Stories by Nathan Asch, John Dos Passos, and Ernest Hemingway are notable. Djuna Barnes has some fine cameos; hers is an admirable art. Half of the authors represented are American. Some few of the stories are rather horrible, but there is variety and, altogether, a high level of performance. From the introduction by Ford Madox Ford I take the liberty of quoting one sentence: "Saying too much has in fact been my ruin."

F. L. M.

The Best British Short Stories, edited by EDWARD J. O'BRIEN and JOHN COURNOS. (Small, Maynard, \$2.50). This fourth volume of the series of annual anthologies edited by Messrs. O'Brien and Cournos is, like its predecessors, an excellent collection. The story by A. E. Coppard, "Fifty Pounds," is the best story I have yet read by that author. John Metcalfe's story "Picnic" has power, and Miss Farjeon's "Faithful Jenny Dove" is one of the most charming of ghost stories. There is some first-class work in Francis Brett Young's "The Cage Bird," I recommend this book to all *Midland* readers.

F. L. M.

Precious Bane, by MARY WEBB. (Dutton, \$2.00). When the modern novel market is flooded with sophisticated authors exploiting sex complexes, subtleties of psychoanalysis, and radical technique, the quaint beauty and refreshing simplicity of a story like *Precious Bane* is a real treat in fiction. The novel owes its naive charm partly to its rural Shropshire setting and dialect of a hundred years or so back; and in greater part to the sheer poetry of the diction. A sincere love for the English countryside is written here. Furthermore, some thoroughly admirable objective presentation of character is achieved.

The book in itself reminds me a little of *Lorna Doone*. I have read no other work of Mary Webb, but the realistic beauty of this story of Prue Sarn would lead me to anticipate such a reading with pleasure.

R. L.

Selected Poems, by EDGAR LEE MASTERS. (Macmillan, \$2.50). In his prefatory note Mr. Masters tells us that in the nine years since *Spoon River* he has published two thousand pages of verse. This in addition to several novels. I have read somewhere that his grandparents all lived to be over ninety: if their poetical scion equals them in longevity, and continues to write at the rate he has set, he will have produced before his own epitaph is written, some ten thousand pages of verse — and that doesn't include the half dozen volumes before *Spoon River*. I fear, moreover, that they will be ten thousand pages of pretty dull and pedestrian verse.

Spoon River is Masters' one notable achievement, and it is notable chiefly because it came at the nick of time in the beginning of the "revolt against the village." *Domesday Book* is remarkable chiefly for its great plan — a plan borrowed from Browning. As for poetry, I find surprisingly little of it in the four hundred pages of these *Selected Poems*.

F. L. M.

A Lover of the Beautiful, by HARRIET JOOR. (Richard G. Badger). Here are two really beautiful stories, by a contributor to *The Midland* whose sensitive work will be remembered with delight by all who have read it. The style of these stories fits admirably their substance, and the stories are developed with a light and sure touch that is exceptional. Especially pleasant are the vivid word-pictures which abound. The decorations are harmonious, and I wish that there might be more of them.

J. T. F.

BIOGRAPHICAL

TUPPER GREENWALD will be remembered as the author of "Corputt," "Before He Gave Them Wheat," "The Hill," and "Wheels," published in former numbers of *THE MIDLAND*. His home is in Cincinnati.

MISS RUTH LECHLITNER has published poems in various periodicals. *THE MIDLAND* for August, 1925, was wholly devoted to her work. She is at present a graduate student at the University of Iowa.

